**[How it happens](https://www.dawn.com/news/1816717/how-it-happens)**

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THE following is a recent tweet by the renowned lawyer-turned-politician Salman Akram Raja: “I am often invited to lecture under-training officers at various state academies about law and ethics. They look so promising as young men and women. Yet in a few years so many of them turn out to be tormentors of law and ethics. How does this happen?”

Let us see how.

Civil servants in Pakistan are trained throughout their careers to uphold the law and follow the written rules in letter and spirit. Such training is usually a waste of time as training materials are so removed from reality that one sometimes wonders if they are meant for the civil servants of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan. Many times, during training, one gets the feeling that we are a part of the Singapore civil service or perhaps are being trained to serve in some developed country where everyone is subservient to the law of the land.

To cut a long story short, these trainings are very bookish and cater to the politically correct aspects of the life of a civil servant. All case studies would refer to members of the public approaching a government office with a grievance and the kind of action one must take as a civil servant to redress the concern. Nobody tells the poor civil servant what to do if someone puts a gun to your head and asks you to endorse an election result.

In the recent election, administrative officers (assistant commissioners and deputy commissioners) were appointed Returning Officers and District Returning Officers for most constituencies. Critics argued that these officers could be easily manipulated, but then, aren’t judicial officers or military officers just as easily manipulated? The recent judgements by the judiciary or actions by the military establishment are enough to prove my point.

Nobody tells the bureaucrat what to do if a gun is put to his head.

The bureaucracy is no better than an ostrich that buries its head in the sand when in danger and that tries to train everybody joining the fold to do the same. If the recent elections were unfair, if the results were changed, then by now a sizable number of civil servants should have stood up. A few should have blown the whistle on the evening of election day when all of this was going on. This indicates two things: either the elections were fair or the civil servants are unfair. I will leave the readers to figure out the truth.

Also, it is pertinent to point out that the civil service is not like the military where the orders from one’s senior just cannot be denied. Civil service as an institution is supposed to give respect to the good judgement of each officer. They can differ from their boss and are even encouraged to put such a difference of opinion in writing. They can raise red flags and even choose to be whistle-blowers but what keeps them from doing any of this?

Maslow’s hierarchy of needs puts physiological needs at the very base of the pyramid and then come safety and security needs. For our poor civil servant both these needs are highly endangered throughout their careers. They live from paycheck to paycheck, hence cannot think of life beyond their job and will do anything to protect it. Regarding safety and security, they see what happened to even the senior most civil servants when they refused to comply with the orders of powerful quarters. The principal secretary to the prime minister is at the pinnacle of the bureaucracy, and in recent years those occupying the post have been the ones who were either jailed or simply abducted till they were ready to speak the ‘truth’ that they were told. Under such circumstances, how can we expect an assistant commissioner to take a stand?

The so-called [confession](https://www.dawn.com/news/1815126) of facilitating election rigging by the former commissioner is so flimsy that in due course of time a thorough investigation would reveal that what he was saying did not have merit. A seasoned civil servant would not be so naïve as to name the chief justice when the latter cannot possibly influence the results on the election day. Also, when one makes a confession on the call of his conscience one becomes fearless and tends to name everyone, not some ‘chiefs’; avoiding the proverbial elephant in the room makes his claims a lot less credible. The treatment meted out to him during the investigation will also serve as a deterrent for anybody who is planning to be a genuine whistle-blower. In his case it has already produced a [retraction](https://www.dawn.com/news/1816416).

Lastly, now that we have answered how it happens let us also answer when will it all end. When we are as brave as we expect others to be, and when the public will not expect civil servants to show the kind of bravado which they themselves cannot.

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